DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 469 020 HE 035 276

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TITLE	Use of Part-Time Faculty in Higher Education: Numbers and Impact. Briefing Papers.
INSTITUTION	Association of American Colleges and Universities, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2001-09-00
NOTE	6p.; Prepared for the Association of American Colleges and Universities Greater Expectations National Panel.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.aacu-edu.org/gex/briefingpapers/ .
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Freedom; Employment Patterns; *Faculty Workload; Higher Education; *Part Time Faculty; Teacher Characteristics

ABSTRACT

Colleges and universities of all kinds rely on part-time faculty to teach students from the freshman year through graduate studies, although they are more likely to teach lower division students. Overall, 43% of postsecondary instructional faculty work part-time, while full-time tenure track positions are held by about 18% of faculty members. Part-time faculty are most likely to teach at community colleges (66%) and least likely to teach at public four-year colleges (27%). Some faculty teach part-time by choice, but others who want to work full-time may take jobs at several institutions to survive, leaving themselves less available to students and less engaged in institution affairs. Part-time faculty are deprived of the protection provided by tenure, as are nontenured full-time faculty. The increasing use of nontenure-track and part-time faculty, described as "contingent" faculty by Jane Buck, poses several problems. They may avoid writing assignments to save grading time, or self-censor in the absence of protection for academic freedom. They may inflate student grades or pander to students in an effort to assure a continuing contract. These issues must be addressed to ensure excellence in higher education. (Contains 10 references.) (SLD)

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Use of Part-Time Faculty in Higher Education: Numbers and Impact

September, 2001

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ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES,
SEPTEMBER 2001

Greater Expectations National Panel

USE OF PART-TIME FACULTY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: NUMBERS AND IMPACT

prepared by Ross Miller, AAC&U

Introduction

Colleges and universities of all kinds rely upon part-time faculty to teach students from the freshman year through graduate studies. Part-time faculty tend to be hired to teach lower division undergraduate students, although it is not uncommon for them to teach upper division courses, too. While the use of part-time faculty is neither inherently good nor bad, conditions of their employment may limit opportunities to develop new pedagogical skills and to provide academic support to their students. Other issues associated with the use of part-time and full-time non-tenure-track faculty pose potential serious threats to the integrity and rigor of college learning.

The Numbers

- Overall, 43% of postsecondary instructional faculty and staff work part time.
- Full-time non-tenure-track positions are held by about 18% of faculty members.
- Percentage of part-time faculty varies by type of school: 66% at community colleges, 41% at four-year private schools, 27% at public 4-years colleges. (NB: The lower percentage of part-time faculty at 4-year institutions does not necessarily translate to more teaching by full-time faculty. In 1993, in addition to 184,000 part-time faculty positions, there were some 200,000 graduate assistants in 4-year institutions with graduate programs.)

U.S. Department of Education figures for part-time faculty (from 1998) show a fairly steady increase in the percentage of part-time faculty from 34% in 1977 to 43% in 1998. Figures for full-time non-tenure-track faculty show the same pattern of steady increase from 8% in 1987 to 18% in 1998. AAUP cites part-time usage at 46% so it appears that at least the part-time trend continues upward.

- 82% of part-time faculty teach two or fewer courses (50% teach only one). 82% spend 9.9 or fewer hours per week teaching.
- On average, part-time faculty spend 12.9% of their 11.7 paid hours per week on research/scholarship and professional development in contrast to full-time faculty's 22.3% (of their 42.6 paid hours).

Most part-time faculty, it appears, devote little time to activities generally related

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to quality in college instruction, i.e. scholarship/research, professional development, etc. With a typical stipend of between $2000 and $3000 per course, they are paid well below a pro-rata figure calculated from even a low-ranking full-time faculty's compensation. On average, their hours at any one institution represent less than half of their total paid hours.

As the *Condition of Education, 2000* summarizes:
Some faculty teach part time by choice, such as parents who care for children, but others do not. Those who teach part time but desire full-time work sometimes teach at several institutions in order to support themselves....Consequently, they may be less available to students and less able to participate in the activities of any one institution. (emphasis added)

Jane Buck, president of AAUP, believes that the increasing use of full-time non-tenure track faculty creates many of the same problems for student learning that arise with part-time faculty. (Buck refers to both part-time and full-time non-tenurable faculty as "contingent" faculty.)

What is the impact on students? It is not uncommon for contingent faculty to teach as many as six courses per semester at several institutions in order to survive financially. These "road scholars" only rarely have office space or academic support and typically do not keep office hours or serve on committees. They are often evaluated only by their students, because their numbers preclude more thorough peer review. Because they are neither tenured nor tenurable, as a practical matter they are deprived of the protection that academic freedom affords.

Buck explains that contingent faculty, because of their working conditions, may be tempted to:

- avoid frequent writing assignments to save grading time,
- self-censor in the absence of protection for academic freedom,
- avoid rigor and/or inflate grades to boost student evaluations of their teaching, and
- pander to students to build popularity and in an attempt to assure a continuing contract.

Commentary:
Both issues are of special concern because of the tendency for part-time faculty to be assigned to lower-division undergraduate classes, classes often populated by the students most in need of extra-class help and not yet comfortable with the demands of college-level work. Full-time faculty are busy and are unlikely to be able to compensate for the student contact hours not provided by part-time faculty. Especially at colleges that employ high percentages of part-time faculty, faculty transience may create large gaps in desperately needed support for student learning. Lower-division undergraduate classes are also critical initial experiences for students' engagement with higher-order learning, situations especially amenable to pedagogy more imaginative and stimulating than dry lecture.

Buck's list of potential pitfalls for part-time faculty are additional concerns, more subtle perhaps but still problematic for quality student learning. Individual campuses need to look long and hard at the way contingent faculty are treated as well as how they behave and then improve rewards and working conditions so that such practices lose their allure.

Inadequate faculty time for students or lack of skill in new pedagogies, however, is not a problem only with part-time faculty. Colleges and universities should analyze the working conditions and reward structures for all faculty. Contracts should allow sufficient compensated time for teaching, preparation, student advising and mentoring, and professional development so that students are not short-changed by faculty of any status or rank. Campuses may still save money and gain needed flexibility by using part-time and non-tenure-track faculty, but they should ensure that the central goal of student learning is equally or better achieved through such strategic hiring and all-faculty development practices. In the end, the "contingent" faculty as well as the full time, tenure-track faculty should be supported and developed so that student learning thrives.

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